

H.B. No. 5448 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER EDUCATOR PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION.

Rep. Susan Johnson

I am speaking in support of Raised Bill No. 5448

The plight of English Language Learners in Connecticut schools is a growing concern. The needs of English Language Learners (ELLs) and closing the academic achievement gap are tightly linked with higher education policy, especially as it pertains to teacher training and pre-service teacher preparation programs.

The ELL Task Force, convened by myself and Rep. Andres Ayala, is conducting extensive information gathering from all stakeholders and will provide a series of recommendations as a result of this process. The Task Force's Mission Statement is to improve the way that Connecticut educates its English Language Learners, by enhancing programs, increasing accessibility and training our instructors with proper methods.

I represent Windham, a priority school district with many ELL students. The task force has heard from a number of bilingual/ Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) teachers in Priority School Districts. They assert that a significant contributor to the academic achievement gap for ELLs in Connecticut can be attributed to the inadequate preparation of general education and specialized staff. The chronic shortage areas and lack of qualified minority candidates are indicators of systemic failure to address the needs of a dynamic population with tremendous potential to lead Connecticut in the effort to develop a vibrant, multilingual workforce and cultural landscape. Based upon applicant pool size, vacancies due to the lack of qualified applicants, the number of teaching certificates issued per available position and other factors, the CSDE designated bilingual education as a shortage area for the 2010-11 school year.

I believe that we need to build sustainable pathways to both teacher certification and credentialing that will link, in meaningful ways, PreK-12, Alternate Route Programs and existing teacher preparation programs. Recommendations being considered include:

- Strategies to eliminate the shortage areas in Bilingual and TESOL cross-endorsement areas, particularly through articulation agreements with the community colleges and the Alternate Route to Certification for Teachers of English Language Learners (ARCTELL).
- Requirements to improve the instructional repertoires of all teachers with respect of the needs of ELLs, particularly through strengthened requirements for course work in second language acquisition, theory and applied practice.

- Development and enhancement of incentives including Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) tuition support for the most challenging positions in Priority School Districts.
- Development of clear pathways for minority candidates and native language speakers to attain teaching certification and credentials to support evidence-based instruction of ELLs (both Spanish speakers and low-incidence languages)

I want to thank the Chairs and Members of the Higher Education Committee for raising this very important bill and I look forward to presenting the ELL Taskforce's recommendations increasing ELL Teacher Certification in the near future.